

# How to Develop a Winning Scholarship Application

Both Melissa Smithdeal, left, and Aubrey Johnson, right, received nursing scholarships.



## Initial Planning

### Developing a Personal Data Sheet

Start building a data sheet or resume on yourself now. There is standard information that almost all applications require. Compiling this data as you go along makes the actual scholarship application process much easier. You can design a data sheet that is easily updated.

You may have heard “Grades aren’t everything,” but many of decisions are influenced by your GPA. If it is not high now, do not give up; you have time to bring it up. Besides, other factors will be considered such as those that follow.

### Standardized Test Scores

Most colleges require that you take some type of standardized test (SAT, ACT) in order to be admitted. In addition, many scholarship awarding agencies use standardized test scores as a part of the criteria for determining scholarship eligibility. Keep this in mind and prepare for the test(s) you plan to take.

### Employment

Whether you have held a job is an important factor in determining your responsibility level. Earning your own way and showing that you can be reliable indicates commitment and dedication.

### Family Responsibilities

Some students have children or must care for younger brothers/sisters. Providing such care is a very responsible job. Many scholarship agencies will take into account this time-consuming commitment.

### Extracurricular Activities

Often, your activities say more about you than anything else. Activities show where your interests are and provide experience and references that may be invaluable. The quality of your involvement is more important than the quantity. Holding an office and/or being in charge of an activity is more noteworthy than only being a member. Make sure to include outstanding talents and/or specific skills as well as volunteer experience.

### Athletics

Being part of an athletic program shows that you not only have dedication to an activity, but also have the ability to work as a “team player.” You are someone who participates and functions within a group.

### Honors and/or Awards

The honors and awards you have received help demonstrate that you are focused and goal oriented. Make sure to include the year and the nature of the honor or award.

### Outlining Personal and Career Goals

Continue to examine your personal goals. You may be asked to write essays on these types of topics:

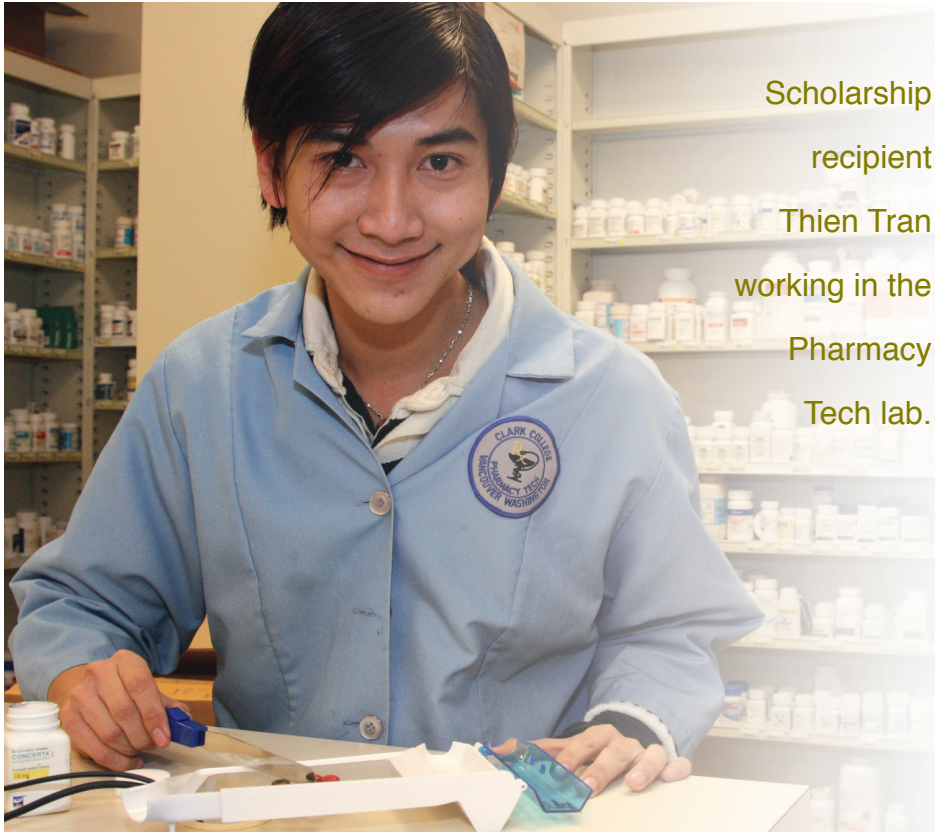
- What are your educational and career goals? Spend some time thinking about your career path. This process is important! The Career Center at Clark can assist you in this process. (360-992-2902)
- Where do you see yourself five years from now?
- What are your three best characteristics?
- How will your education be financed?

### Identifying References

Contact three or more individuals to act as references. Make sure to include at least one instructor. Ask people who have a good knowledge of your abilities and can speak positively about your commitment, leadership skills, goals, etc.

- Ask more references than are required. Give them at least two weeks to complete and return letters.
- Verify that they would be willing to write a recommendation for you.
- Provide each reference with a personal data sheet or information that will assist them in writing a recommendation for you.
- Thank your references.

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Scholarship recipient  
Thien Tran  
working in the  
Pharmacy  
Tech lab.

## Beginning the Application Process

### Look for Scholarship Opportunities

- Contact your high school counselor or the scholarship coordinator at the college or university you plan to attend.
- While many schools have applications online, there are many organizations that still only provide paper applications.
- Other prospects for obtaining scholarships: admissions/registration offices; academic departments; activities offices (band, newspaper, choral, etc.); athletic departments; ROTC departments; local service organizations (Rotary, Lions, Kiwanis, etc.); local corporations; churches; unions; professional societies; women's groups (AAUW, NOW, BPW, Soroptimist, PEO, Altrusa, etc.); PTA's, hospital guilds or auxiliaries; American Legion, VFW, AMVETS and other veterans' groups; and other organizations in which you or your parents are members.
- Scholarship information is contained in counselors' newsletters, on bulletin boards, in college brochures, in specific reference books, organizational pamphlets, etc.

- Scholarship Finding Services—Be careful with these services. While most of them guarantee you at least five (5) application sources, they do not guarantee you successful results.
- Check college websites and free scholarship searches online. The WashBoard is a safe tool for learning about scholarship opportunities in the state ([thewashboard.org](http://thewashboard.org)).
- Ask parents, teachers, counselors, professionals, and Financial Aid Office staff about scholarships.

### Contact each source to obtain a scholarship application

- Check the eligibility requirements, FIRST. These will be listed on an announcement or on the application itself.
- Apply for every scholarship for which you can meet all the requirements. There is no limit to how many scholarships you can receive in a year.
- Scholarship eligibility criteria are set by the donor or the selection committee. Each scholarship has different requirements.

## Completing the Application

- READ ALL INSTRUCTIONS FIRST!
- Make copies of the original application first so that you have a working draft.
- Before submitting an online application, type your text in a word processor to check for spelling and grammar. Keep copies of what you submit so you can access it for other applications.

### Start early and treat each application as a project

- Do not attempt to complete the entire process the day before the deadline. Projects take time, especially when you need recommendation letters from others. Allow at least two weeks to complete the process, keeping in mind that receiving transcripts from out-of-the-area schools may take up to eight weeks, and references should be given at least two weeks to prepare letters.
- The application is the scholarship committee's only impression of you, and you will want to put your best foot forward. A haphazard, last-minute effort usually shows and does not leave a favorable impression with the committee.

### Review each application carefully

- Make a checklist of everything you need to do to complete and mail each application. Assign deadlines to each of the tasks so you will have them completed on schedule. Check off tasks as they are completed.
- Make sure you follow all directions on the application. You do not want to go to all the effort to complete the application, only to disqualify yourself by not paying close attention to directions. If the application asks for a one-page document, only provide a one-page document. If an official transcript is required, do not include a photocopy of your transcript. If professional references are requested, do not send a reference from your next-door neighbor or a family friend.
- Answer all questions. Leaving a space blank does not mean "no" or "none;" it means you didn't answer the question.



- Plan to submit your application at least one week prior to the deadline. Most schools and organizations do not make allowances for late applications, regardless of the reason.

### Remember that the committee is looking for quality, not quantity

A list of everything a person has done is not as effective as a select group of the most outstanding achievements. You don't want the committee to have to search for your best.

- **Essays.** If you are required to submit an essay, make sure the entire response is well organized, covers all required areas in a logical manner, has continuity, is concise, and makes sense. There is no magic formula for essays. They should be in your own words, and they should sell YOU.
- **You are writing for a purpose.** Be persuasive in showing the reader you are deserving of the award. Remember your audience.
- **Make certain you understand the question or topic.** Your essay should answer the question or speak directly to the given topic.
- **List all ideas—any possibilities.** Be creative; brainstorm without censoring.
- **Sort through ideas and prioritize.** You cannot tell them everything. Be selective.
- **Choose information and ideas,** that are not reflected in other parts of your application. This is your chance to supplement your application with information you want them to know.

### Writing the Draft—Apply what you learned in English class

- Develop paragraphs—one idea at a time. Include topic sentences with examples of your point or convincing reasoning.
- Make smooth transitions between paragraphs. Select action verbs and avoid the passive voice.
- Use concrete examples. Often examples of behavior demonstrate an idea better than an adjective. Show, don't just tell.
- Develop exact, concrete language. Avoid vague references, wordy usage, or clichés.

### Editing Your Draft

- Does your introduction capture the reader's attention?
- Are you consistent in your verb tense?
- Are you clear and coherent?
- Have you checked for grammatical and spelling errors?
- Does the essay present you as you wish to be seen?
- Did another person review your essay for possible errors?
- Would you remember your essay if you read two hundred others?
- Does the essay present you as you wish to be seen?
  - Does your closing paragraph present you as you wish to be remembered?
  - Let your information sit for a few days, then go back and reread it. Did you follow directions carefully? Are your answers well written and to the point? Did you put your best foot forward?

### Ask someone to review your application

Select a person whose opinion and constructive criticism you will respect and accept. The person should be someone who will be impartial, honest, and capable of offering suggestions for improvement. Keep in mind that if your words do not make sense to this person, they probably won't make sense to a selection committee, either.

Provide the reviewer with a copy of the application along with your responses. This will help ensure that you have not overlooked anything and that you have answered the questions in the manner requested.

### Putting your application packet together

- Type your final copy unless specifically instructed otherwise. Proofread carefully, regardless of whether you are using a computer that checks spelling. Spelling checkers do not identify misused words or transposed letters that actually spell words. Handwritten applications are not as professional and, depending upon your handwriting, may be difficult to read. The final document should reflect your best effort.
- Review your references and select the best ones to submit with your application.
- Include requested transcripts. Scholarship committees usually require students to submit official transcripts. It is the student's responsibility to make transcript requests as needed. Some applications require official transcripts to be forwarded directly to selection committees by the schools or colleges. Read the application carefully and follow the directions. Follow up with the schools and colleges from which you have requested transcripts to make sure that the necessary information has been forwarded and will be received prior to the application deadline.
- Check to see that everything is signed. The application is not complete otherwise.
- Review your checklist and make sure that all items have been addressed and all requested information is included in the packet or has been forwarded to the selection committee.



Kurt Simonson  
received an  
automotive  
scholarship.

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Scholarship recipients and their donors at the 2014 Scholarship Reception

## Submitting your application packet

- If submitting online, be sure to check all information before finalizing. Find out if you can make changes to the application after you start it and plan accordingly.
- Check the application packet one last time to make sure that all information requested is in the envelope and that all signatures are included.
- Delivery in person. If your application packet is being hand delivered, do it yourself in order to ensure that it is delivered to the appropriate office prior to the deadline. Don't rely on someone else to do this important task.

- Sending by mail. Address the mailing envelope according to instructions. Proofread carefully. Mail the application at least one week prior to the deadline. Allow more time if possible. It is critical that the envelope has adequate postage. You may want to send the packet by certified mail, return receipt requested, so you will have documentation of the date it is received by the selection committee.
- Be sure to keep a copy of your completed application. Note on your copy the date the application is mailed and to whom.

## Keep a positive attitude

This may sound like a lot to do, but the rewards are worth it; and if you allow

yourself adequate time, it will not be an overwhelming task. Many students have received thousands of dollars from scholarship application efforts. You can too!

## Saying Thank You

### If awarded a scholarship

- Send a thank-you note. If you are granted a scholarship, be certain to keep in touch with the donors. It is especially crucial to maintain contact if the scholarship is renewable.
- Clarify scholarship renewal terms. Find out if you must meet specific conditions to have your award renewed.



CLARK COLLEGE FOUNDATION/CCF 039  
1933 FORT VANCOUVER WAY  
VANCOUVER, WA 98663-3598